

EPCC to remain open

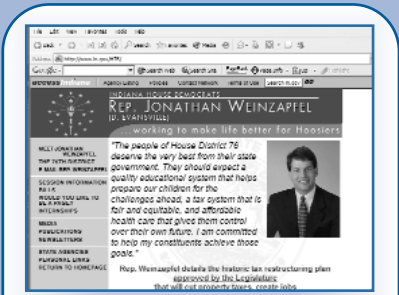
The Evansville Psychiatric Children’s Center (EPCC) will remain open. House Bill 1001, passed during the recent special session of the Indiana General Assembly, guarantees its operation.

It has been a long battle to keep the EPCC from closing. With growing concern over the state budget, Gov. Frank O’Bannon announced in March that the center would close in June of this year, and that children would be better served in community-based programs.

This prompted an outcry from EPCC staff, parents and local residents. I joined with other state legislators from our community in calling for a local public hearing with John Hamilton, the secretary of the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration, to discuss the impact of the proposed closing. Announcing the center’s closing date only months before it was to take effect raised a number of legitimate questions about relocation and treatment options for the children. The public deserved a venue to voice their concerns.

When Gov. O’Bannon called the legislature back for a special session, I knew that we must find a way to protect the center. It was clear that only one bill would be considered during the session, House Bill 1001, dedicated to restructuring taxes, correcting the budget deficit and building Indiana’s economy. I worked to include a provision in the bill that would keep the EPCC open.

The fate of HB 1001 was in doubt for much of the 40-day session, but in the end it passed both the Senate and the House, and was signed into law by the governor. With its passage, the EPCC will continue to be available to provide services to youths who need the type of psychiatric treatment in which the center specializes.



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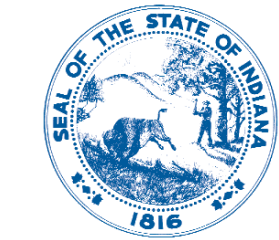


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Summer, 2002


Dear Friends:

While there has been plenty of news coverage about the passage of a major tax and budget reform bill during the recent special legislative session, several other bills became law this year which are also worth noting.

During the first session of the 2002 Indiana General Assembly I worked on bills addressing the environment, election reform, and public safety and anti-terrorism. I have detailed a number of these new laws in this newsletter. In addition, we passed legislation to prohibit the closing of the Evansville Psychiatric Children’s Center and worked to ensure that the University of Southern Indiana can begin offering engineering classes this fall semester.

This is the last newsletter you’ll receive from me for the 2002 legislature, but please know that I am always available to assist you in any way that I can. Contact me if you have questions or concerns about state government. You may e-mail me at [H76@in.gov](mailto:H76@in.gov) or call toll free, 1-800-382-9842.

Sincerely,







## Weinzapfel bill funds contaminated well clean up

During the first legislative session, the Indiana General Assembly approved House Bill 1227, a bill I authored, which will generate a consistent funding mechanism to clean up abandoned and contaminated oil and gas well sites. This law will help ensure that sites can be rehabilitated in a timely fashion and well help well owners and operators in saving costs.

Operators with a good environmental record will only be required to pay fees to the oil and gas environmental fund dedicated to cleaning up sites, rather than paying an insurer for the cost of a bond. The fund will maintain a sizable minimum balance in case of an emergency.

Through this bill, oil and gas well operators can demonstrate their commitment to preserving the environment, and the state will have an ongoing source of funding to take care of abandoned sites. The bill was signed into law by Gov. O'Bannon earlier this spring.



REP. WEINZAPFEL DISCUSSES LEGISLATION WITH REP. BRIAN HASLER (D-EVANSVILLE).

## Legislature stands together on public safety laws

After the terrorist attacks of September 11, officials across the country took a serious look at the ability of local emergency systems to respond to a similar threat. The Indiana General Assembly passed several laws during the first session this year to help meet the challenge of our new defense requirements.

House Bill 1001, which I co-authored, established a Counter-Terrorism and Safety Council (CTASC) that will serve as the coordinating state agency for emergency management response to terrorist acts. Chaired by the lieutenant governor, the council will develop anti-terrorism strategy, including placing an affiliate of the council in each county, coordinating efforts with the U.S. Office of Homeland Security, and implementing counter-terrorism training in the state law enforcement academy.

Part of a \$1.25 BMV service charge included in the bill will be used to develop an integrated wireless public safety system to help connect agencies across the state in case of an emergency (see article on Project Hoosier SAFE-T). A portion of the service charge

will also be used to alleviate the state police crime laboratory backlog.

The law includes penalties for several terrorist and public safety issues, including:

- money laundering to support terrorist activities;
- restrictions on the issuance of commercial driver's licenses and hazardous materials endorsements;
- penalties concerning regulated explosives or devices, the possession of a weapon of mass destruction or the intent to cause a person to believe that a



substance is a weapon of mass destruction;

- disorderly conduct on airport premises;
- interruption or impairment of work at a food processing facility; and
- the expulsion of a student who brings a destructive device on school property.

While no one foresaw the devastation of the September attacks, we are taking every step possible to maintain Indiana's safety to the fullest extent.

## Weinzapfel bill to bring election reform

House Bill 1101, which contained language that I authored to continue improvements in the way elections are conducted in Indiana, also was approved by the Indiana General Assembly this past session.

Reforming the way we run elections should be an ongoing effort, and we constantly must watch for opportunities to improve the way elections are conducted. The changes included in House Bill 1101 were a part of legislative debate since the start of this year's first session, and I feel they represent the next step in what should be done to preserve the integrity of the process while making it easier for people to participate in elections.

The changes brought by this bill include provisional voting for people whose names might not be listed on the voter rolls in the precinct where they are casting a ballot. Another section of the bill allows voters to verify their ballots before votes are officially cast.

We also sought to make voting systems more accessible to people with disabilities, as well as streamlining the process of absentee balloting for overseas and military voting. In addition, the bill provides tools

to educate voters, including sample ballots and posting a voter's bill of rights at all precinct locations.

Most of the changes in HB 1101 were recommended by a bipartisan commission that met last summer to look at ways to upgrade the election process in Indiana. I participated in the election task force hearing that met in Evansville because of my work in recent sessions on several reform proposals. In 2001 I authored a bill that will enable counties to enter into agreements brokered by the state to upgrade voting equipment and systems, and provide grants to finance those improvements. That law was a significant step forward, particularly by getting rid of the outdated and ineffective punch-card system. However, it is my hope that we will be able to continue the reforms that will help Indiana avoid election scandals in the future.



REP. WEINZAPFEL DISCUSSES LEGISLATION WITH REP. BRIAN HASLER AND REP. DENNIS AVERY, BOTH OF EVANSVILLE.

## Project Hoosier SAFE-T

Part of the new anti-terrorism law provides funding for Project Hoosier SAFE-T, a system allowing public safety agencies to communicate with each other during emergencies.

Any event that crosses county lines, such as a severe storm, a police chase or a fatal accident puts the first responders and the victims at risk if officials are unable to cooperate and respond quickly.

This system will connect all participating local, state and federal public safety agencies. Eliminating incompatible or obsolete radio systems will save Hoosier lives.

## USI to offer bachelor's degree in engineering

The University of Southern Indiana (USI) will be able to offer a bachelor's degree in engineering this fall, which marks a huge step forward in the educational and economic growth of southern Indiana. This is a major breakthrough in providing the kind of training that will produce graduates with high-tech skills who can meet the workforce needs of a changing world economy.

I worked with officials from the state Commission on Higher Education on an agreement that will allow USI to offer an expanded engineering degree program on its own by using existing faculty and resources at no additional cost. Alternatively, USI could offer a joint degree program in engineering with Purdue University.

With an engineering program that will be accessible and affordable to people living in southern Indiana, we can immediately respond to both high levels of interest among students and the employment needs of the area business community.

Interest levels are so high that students already in the engineering technology program could begin formally working toward their degree this fall and graduate in 2004.